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House of Representatives

The House met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore [Mrs. WALDHOLTZ].

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,

March 7, 1995.

I hereby designate the Honorable ENID G. WALDHOLTZ to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NEWT GINGRICH,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING BUSINESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 1995, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member except the majority and minority leaders limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida [Mr. JOHNSTON] for 5 minutes.

ETHICAL VIOLATIONS: PAST AND PRESENT

Mr. JOHNSTON of Florida. Madam Speaker, until 2 weeks ago, in almost 20 years of public service, I had never filed a complaint against a colleague, even though I twice served on committees charged with investigating colleagues for ethical violations in the Florida State Senate with their censure or dismissal often hanging in the balance.

In 30 years of the practice of law, I never filed an ethics complaint against a colleague, even though again, I

served for many years on the grievance committee of the Florida Bar which recommended to the bar either disbarment, suspension, or reprimand for serious violations of ethical standards.

Accordingly, I do not take lightly such complaints against a colleague, and in particular, the Speaker of the House.

On Wednesday, February 22 of this year, I became a signatory, along with Congresswomen PAT SCHROEDER and CYNTHIA MCKINNEY, to a complaint filed with the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct against Speaker NEWT GINGRICH.

The first response to our complaint by the Speaker was communicated through his staff assistant, who, according to the Washington Post, " * * * accused the lawmakers who filed the complaint of 'malicious imbecility.' " I consider this a rather intemperate remark, to say the least, and as much as the spokesman is an employee of the House of Representatives and a surrogate of the Speaker, I find his tone and language both offensive and inappropriate.

On Friday of the same week, Mr. GINGRICH made the following statement with respect to our complaint: "They are misusing the ethics system in a deliberate, vicious, vindictive way, and I think it is despicable and I have just about had it."

I do not plan to discuss the merits of the complaint against Mr. GINGRICH this morning. I believe that would be improper, because the matter is now within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct. If and when there are charges filed against the Speaker by the committee, the full House will sit in judgment of these charges. I will comment, however, on the history of the Speaker's complaints against a former colleague.

It is common knowledge that Mr. GINGRICH filed numerous complaints against Speaker Jim Wright in 1988,

and I quote at length from an article in the New York Times dated June 10, 1988:

The New York Times has examined the case against Mr. Wright through interviews with the House Republican who has been his main accuser, as well as with the Speaker's attorney and legal experts and through a review of the House rules, transcripts of congressional debate of those rules and other documents.

In the course of that examination, the Speaker's primary critic, Representative Newt Gingrich of Georgia and Mr. Gingrich's aides said that there were errors and gaps in the complaint that he had filed with the Ethics Committee and that led to the panel's proceedings, but they said that what was most important was a full inquiry into the Speaker's actions, as well as a review of the adequacy of the House rules.

The case against Mr. Wright as laid out in the complaint is not particularly strong, according to Mr. Gingrich and his aides. Mr. Gingrich said in an interview earlier this week that the two counts involving oil investments had been included in his complaint solely "out of curiosity" and that "I don't expect them to be actionable items."

Let me repeat that 7 years ago, Mr. GINGRICH told the New York Times that he filed two counts against the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives solely out of curiosity and with no expectation of their being actionable.

My complaint against the Speaker of the House on February 22 certainly was not conceived out of curiosity and certainly does not rise or fall to the level of malicious imbecility, and certainly, as quoting the Speaker in reference to this complaint, is not offered in a deliberate, vicious, vindictive way. I would never charge a colleague with misconduct and the violation of a law and ethics, as I have done, without serious and conscientious deliberation and conviction.

Continuing in a historical vein, I have attached to these remarks a press release issued by Mr. GINGRICH through

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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